

VZCZCXRO0325  
PP RUEHROV  
DE RUEHNR #3392/01 2160736  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
P 040736Z AUG 06  
FM AMEMBASSY NAIROBI  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3500  
INFO RUCNIAD/IGAD COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RHMFISS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY  
RHMFISS/CJTF HOA PRIORITY  
RHMFISS/USSOCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 NAIROBI 003392

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/01/2026  
TAGS: [PINR](#) [PINS](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [MASS](#) [MOPS](#) [KISL](#) [KPAO](#) [EAID](#)  
KE  
SUBJECT: KENYA COAST: FAILING TO GET OUR MESSAGE OUT

REF: A. REF A) 05 NAIROBI 2409  
[1](#)B. REF B) NAIROBI 01874

Classified By: Political Counselor Larry Andre, reasons 1.4 (b,d)

[1](#)1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Poloff traveled to Mombasa and Lamu to assess the impact of our outreach efforts to this marginalized region. From conversations with a variety of contacts who have worked with us over the past few years, one theme dominated: the message of our contributions to promote development in the region is failing to reach more than a handful of people. Many Coastal residents continue to believe the U.S. is not doing anything concrete for them and is merely &hunting down terrorists8. Most recommended increased cultural activities and personal interaction with communities in order to foster a greater understanding of American people and USG intentions. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (SBU) Poloff traveled to Mombasa June 25-28 and Lamu July 10-13 to evaluate the value of Embassy programs in improving relations with these communities. She met with religious leaders, youth groups, civil society, and government officials, asking all &What can we do better?8 Answers varied, but most admitted, unsolicited, that they were not aware of assistance programs beyond CJTF-HOA Civil Affairs projects in Lamu. They were surprised to learn of the variety of programs and assistance the USG has engaged in throughout the region.

-----  
Mombasa: Reaching out to the Right People  
-----

[1](#)3. (C) As the economic, political and population center of the Coast, Mombasa is the most challenging environment for community outreach and meaningful impact. There is fierce competition for authority between different Muslim organizations, political parties and ethnic groups. Identifying the most effective avenues of communication and centers of influence requires active engagement from Embassy officers with others than the most identifiable political leaders. Although we have succeeded in reaching out to some influential community leaders, it appears that word of our contributions to the Coast and U.S. intentions in the region is not reaching the population at large.

[1](#)4. (C) One influential businessman and up-and-coming politician, who is very well connected politically as well as with the youth and many religious leaders, was surprised when Poloff spoke of U.S. Embassy programs on the Coast, saying he had no idea the U.S. was engaged in so many positive activities. Ali Hassan Joho said that if &well-connected and informed8 people were unaware of U.S. activities, then most Kenyans must be as well. He said that anti-American feelings are pervasive in Mombasa, and most residents suspect the U.S.

of ulterior motives. In fact, Joho said that whereas people such as Aboud Rogo (Kikambala terrorist suspect, ref A) used to actively agitate anti-Western sentiment among Muslim populations on the Coast, they no longer need to be as active as distrust abounds. He criticized the Embassy for meeting too frequently with the &usual suspects8, mainly key politicians and Imams from the two main Muslim organizations, SUPKEM and CIPK, as opposed to engaging more with those who have wider influence, such as Kauli Imams and village elders. (NOTE: The Ambassador had meetings arranged with these two groups during his February, 2006 trip to Mombasa, but was unexpectedly recalled to Nairobi for a meeting with President Kibaki. He was not able to reschedule a meeting before his departure from Post. END NOTE.) Joho strongly encouraged Poloff to seek ways to publicize American contributions to the Coast, by working more closely with grassroots level leaders, in order to counter the myth that the U.S. only cares about terrorism and fighting Islam.

15. (SBU) Another prominent Mombasa businessman, Adan Duale told Poloff that Kenyans are not aware of the many programs sponsored by USAID because they are run through local NGOs. Originally from Garissa, Duale said the only visibility the U.S. has in Northeastern Province is through the &Marines8 (CJTF-HOA Civil Affairs teams), and that has led to suspicion, since most think the &Marines8 use projects as a pretext to &gather information8 (NFI). Duale said the only way to build trust in both Garissa and Mombasa is to have more of an American presence on the ground with people at the project sites and involved directly with various programs.

16. (SBU) SUPKEM Mombasa Chairman, Sheikh Juma Ngao, had similar criticisms of our efforts on the Coast. He complained that high-level or visiting U.S. officials always meet with

NAIROBI 00003392 002 OF 003

the same leaders and then return to Nairobi. He said that in order to get the message out that Americans are &good people8, we must seek a broader base of clerics and respected community leaders through whom to reach out to the broader population. Ngao also complained that there has been too much U.S. emphasis on Lamu, urging us to do more &projects8 in the rest of the Coast. (NOTE: Ngao was referring to CJTF-HOA Civil Affairs projects, which have predominantly been centered in the Lamu area for the past several years. END NOTE). Ngao did state, however, that open, honest interaction is more important than projects, in order to build trust and friendships with Coastal peoples.

17. (SBU) This same sentiment was echoed by several people who advocate more cultural and educational interaction with U.S. officials to bridge the gap between Kenyans and Americans. Murad Saad, head of the Reachout drug rehabilitation center, and someone with whom several Embassy officials have a strong working relationship, requested more American speakers to visit Muslim communities. He said projects have short-term impact, but bringing American Muslims to speak to people goes much further in fostering trust and friendship. Abu Bakaar, former Siyu Councillor and another good Embassy contact, made a similar pitch, asking for more cultural and educational activities that require active participation by American officials. Examples he gave included sponsoring sporting events or education competitions, with an &Ambassador,s trophy8 or other such prizes at the end. He said this is the only way to spread a message of friendship to communities directly instead of through the normal cast of officials. (NOTE: Abu Bakaar has worked closely with CJTF-HOA Civil Affairs teams over the years and is intimately familiar with their projects and their effects on the communities. He has repeatedly told Poloff that personal interaction and demonstration of friendship go much further to &win hearts and minds8 than the actual physical projects. END NOTE).

-----  
Lamu: Moving Beyond Project Dependency  
-----

¶8. (SBU) Lamu presents an entirely different challenge for our Coastal efforts. Small, isolated and less politically diverse than Mombasa, it is much easier to spread a unified message to the residents of Lamu. However, as Lamu is much less involved in the national political arena and more internally focused, the community is also more reactive in nature, meaning every American project and/or presence makes a deep impact on our relationship. There is a small group of influential leaders in the community, and the predominantly Muslim population relies on them for much of their information. Newspapers often arrive in Lamu a day or two late, and most residents with televisions tune to Middle Eastern stations via satellite, although they do receive one Kenyan television station, government-owned KBC.

¶9. (SBU) This situation provides easy channels to get our message out to the residents of Lamu. For example, the town hall meeting led by Poloffs in Lamu in April (Ref B) provided an open environment for Councillors and religious representatives from the different villages to express their views and ask about U.S. intentions. Feedback from this meeting has been very positive, and several community leaders told Poloff that participants valued the opportunity to be heard by American officials. In fact, increased information sharing is what Lamu leaders have repeatedly asked of the Embassy.

¶10. (C) The District Officer (DO), who has been involved in coordinating U.S. activities in Lamu for the past year and a half, told Poloff that through sensitization and awareness raising, we can help dispel the belief that Americans are only in Lamu to conduct surveillance on Somalia. The DO said that some people remain suspicious of U.S. intent in Lamu, especially since the bulk of our presence is military. He advised we have more information sharing sessions with the relevant authorities who can then let Lamu residents know why we are there. He cautioned that too many American officials come through Lamu, but they do not coordinate their activities with the District Commissioner's office, leading to anxiety about their presence. The DO emphasized that there are only a handful of influential decision makers in Lamu, so more open forums with them will be beneficial. He stressed that the relationship between Lamu and the U.S. must outlast the Civil Affairs teams, and this can be accomplished through more cultural and educational exchanges and Embassy-led political discussions.

¶11. (C) Getting the word out of our contributions in Lamu is not a problem. Rather, what type of message we want to spread

NAIROBI 00003392 003 OF 003

and by whom is the issue. CJTF-HOA has inundated Lamu with Civil Affairs projects over the past several years, spending over \$828,000 in Lamu District alone. Our other large footprint, albeit somewhat isolated at the Navy Base, is our U.S. Navy team conducting the Maritime Operations program. The CA teams have gone a long way in improving the U.S., image in Lamu and fostering positive relations, especially when tensions rise over our naval presence. However, Lamu has come to rely on a constant flow of CA projects, to the extent that they associate any American presence with these teams and complain if several months go by without any new projects being initiated. It is a struggle to engage people, whether civil servants, religious leaders or village residents, on issues beyond Civil Affairs projects and their everyday needs.

-----  
Comment  
-----

¶12. (C) Although very different in social and political dynamics, both of these cases demonstrate one key shortcoming of our engagement: information of our programs, intentions and foreign policy objectives is not registering with the communities. In Mombasa, where word of mouth does not spread

beyond small pockets of the community, this is a bigger challenge. With an unprofessional media, we cannot rely on newspaper coverage, although both Sheikh Ngao and Ali Hassan Joho advocated for that path. One Nation journalist in Mombasa, however, admitted that using the newspapers is an unwise choice, as they often distort stories for political purposes. What is needed is more time and interaction with a wider variety of leaders, at all levels, including youth and women groups. Giving money to programs, without American officials spending the necessary time to cultivate the relationships and address peoples, concerns directly has not succeeded in assuring people of our good will.

¶13. (C) Relying on the recipients of our assistance to spread the word on our behalf has backfired in some cases as well. For example, different Embassy elements have supported one Muslim organization in Mombasa with programs and very generous donations. Yet, according to a member of this organization, they have downplayed American sponsorship so as not to appear to be &sell-outs8, and they recently voted to stop working with Americans because of our involvement in Somalia. Having an American officer on the Coast more often to actively follow through with organizations and programs will help ensure we are supporting the right groups and the population realizes we are helping.

¶14. (C) Only through increased, regular engagement can we ensure longevity. CA projects in Lamu have opened many doors for us, but we must find a way to create a meaningful friendship with the community that will outlast the projects. In Lamu, most people believe Americans have good intentions because the CA teams have built so many schools and clinics in the district, but they are cautious about our true purpose since the bulk of our engagement is in the hands of the military. Poloff has found that every time she sits down with political and religious leaders in Lamu, and directly addresses their frustrations, they end by saying they are thankful for the honesty and they feel the relationship is stronger. Simply making American officials more available to this community will go a long way in sustaining goodwill.

HOOVER